

Summary

Wilson Street Business/Property Owner Focus Group
Monday, August 19, 2013

Attendees

Rosemary Lee, resident
Wally Borowski, business owner
Lance McGrath, developer and property owner
Mary Waitrovich, resident

Tom Link, property owner
Henry Doane, business owner
Debby Dines, realtor and resident
Neale Hansen, business owner

1. What do you like about your current business/property location?

- I like living in the area because I don't have a car. I'm close to the Capitol, Walgreens, State Street, and library. I'm against Wilson going two-way.
- I like the proximity. My restaurant is in a great location because of the convention center, hotels, and parking is simple as long as the ramp is still there.
- There will always be a ramp there.
- I've lived in the inner Madison area for years. In addition to what everyone says, I also use Law Park. I bike, rollerblade, and I see there is a need for some serious upgrades. Is upgrading the bike and pedestrian path an option?
- Absolutely. I think this study will look at what the design options are, identify problems, and look at what space needs may require.
- Some of the solutions we will come up with will identify what needs to change and opportunities for park planning.
- I've lived on Wilson Street since 1999. I like it because it's separate from the University – I'm not looking for as crazy of a lifestyle. Where I am, I'm still close to the Capitol and can easily get to Downtown. The area has a fun, grownup feel.
- Paisan's was evicted from its previous location seven years ago. Some of the attributes mentioned drew us to our current location. We wanted to be located in a neighborhood where folks actually live. We now have parking and easy access to our location. Our current location takes advantage of the physical beauty of the area. We have a tremendous view of Lake Monona and Law Park. The preservation of the area is very important to us because it is beauty.
- Do most customers use on street parking or do they park inside?

- We're fortunate the building we're in has a ramp that customers have access to at all times. They pay during the day, we pay at night.

2. What are your biggest concerns regarding Wilson Street and your business/property location?

- We're opposed to going to two-way. If there is a light at King and Wilson, all it would take would be two or three cars that would prevent us from getting out of our building. For the most part, everyone in Marina is extremely opposed to a two-way. We already have no guest parking and are completely dependent of on street parking. Getting rid of on street parking would be detrimental.
- The same goes for my building for guest parking. There is only one parking option.
- I am opposed too. Jamming up the area with cars trying to get in and out of the area will make people perceive the area as a mess. What they just mentioned about parking – we get a lot of people that walk, which is a really nice benefit. You talked about the transit hubs. It would be nice if those could facilitate walking or biking.
- I've heard the ramp [on Pinckney and Wilson] is getting redone. What is the plan for parking while that is being redone?
- It will be redone at some point. There will be replacement parking available. It would never be razed without that.
- From a business perspective, is the street going to be rebuilt completely?
- That is way down the road. Right now, we're just planning for those events.
- On this block or the next, they will need to go into the street for heating and cooling.
- Pinckney would definitely be closed, but Wilson would need to be open.

3. Business owners – have employees or customers issued any complaints regarding your business' location?

- I have customers asking for directions to King Street. One woman was a Madison native, but was irate because Downtown is too complicated to follow. From out-of-towner and customer perspective, it is confusing.

4. Property owners – have your tenants issued any complaints regarding your property's location?

5. Business owners – do you have plans to expand your business?

- We're in a good place, but I'm not going to expand. Other restaurants might be interested in new restaurant space on Wilson.

6. Property owners – do you have plans to make improvements or develop new properties within the South Capitol District?

- Most of my stuff is new, but this is an area where I'm always considering a project.
- If you look at the map from the Downtown Plan, there are several redevelopment opportunities along Wilson Street.
- This is a highly desirable area for tenants. The only negative comments I get are in regard to the connectivity to the lakeshore path. It is like having the Grand Canyon between the Lake and Downtown.

7. This planning study will explore the possibility of converting Wilson Street from Butler Street to Henry Street and from Broom Street to Basset Street from a one-way street to a two-way street. What might be the benefits and drawbacks of doing so?

- I'm not against it, but would need to know more information about impacts.
- One thing that David touched on was that going to two-way would the address bike issue. Wilson would become a different kind of street than it is now.
- I'm very opposed to living on a two-way. I live in Marina and would never get out of the building. We get backup with just the one-way. Who are the users who want two-way? We have John Nolen, which is a beautiful two-way parallel to Wilson.
- Because Wilson changes so much from a one-way to a two-way, out-of-towners get confused. We need to do something about wayfinding or making it easier for nonlocals. The two-way is sometimes a knee jerk reaction to bikers going down the wrong way of Wilson. Some people think that if we build a two way, that would solve the problem. Not necessarily, there are other options on the table
- I feel there isn't as much traffic, at least in front of Tempest. I think it doesn't have a problem that needs to be corrected. Traffic isn't going very fast, currently. A lot of people want a two-way to slow traffic. This isn't like Johnson Street where you would want to do something to correct it.
- Bikes and wayfinding are the biggest issues.
- If you deal with bikes on the street, you will lose all of the parking.
- I think changing it to a two way would be dangerous. I don't think changing the direction of a street is a legitimate traffic calming device.

- Are there maps at the convention center or hotels that are distributed to show the walkability of Downtown? Is it something that could be solved with signage or printed maps? DMI definitely has some maps. You don't necessarily need to add a great level of detail. I go the wrong way sometimes on a street of Madison. But that is what makes it fun being on Isthmus.
- The Concourse and the convention center have wonderful maps.
- It can be incredibly complicated if you don't know the system. You could end up quite confused, back where you started from.
- I think people should be encouraged to park cars and walk Downtown.
- The outer loop is very helpful, but it's hard to describe to people.
- Rosemary: Have any thoughts been given to making Wilson Street all one-way west? Doty is all one way east.
- Certainly, people who are going west from Downtown need to get to Broom Street somehow. That is why Broom to Hamilton are two-ways. If there is a way to reorient traffic, that would be great.
- Has anyone asked the police department how they would feel about converting from one-way to two-way? The entire Downtown and near districts of the police departments go out of the garage of the City-County building.
- Good point. We have not yet.
- There is pretty limited parking space under the City-County Building. It's usually reserved for top city managers, the city engineer. We have not talked to police.

8. What streetscape improvements/developments would you like to see for to Wilson Street?

- I would like to see decent street furniture, like around the Capitol, and more landscaping. I realize landscaping in this climate is not necessarily the best thing. I think even better pedestrian lighting is needed, with lights coming down and not into the sky.
- The railroad tracks could really use improvement. When you come into Madison from John Nolen Drive, that's what you see and it looks terrible. The properties that back up to John Nolen Drive and the railroad tracks don't look right.

- Safety is an issue as well. There are vagrants under properties because there is no door. Tenants will find people sleeping on garage floor.
- That runs all the way through. The back of our buildings are the entrance to the City.
- It looks like hell back there. It's frightening.
- I have a friend who lives on S. Henry. She found people who light fires in her front yard.
- Who owns the green space between John Nolen and the back of buildings?
- The railroad.
- There could be a great bike corridor there.
- My landlord owns the hill behind my building and has tried to keep people out with fence and signs.
- Working with the railroad is very difficult. It would be ideal to landscape there.
- My understanding of the Judge Doyle Square project is that they're planning on having wide terracing of sidewalks for seating, for restaurants, which would create a positive flow. You can't have a bike path, wide sidewalks, make the street two-way, and keep parking. It's a lot to consider. Late at night, outside restaurants can be loud, but I like it. It's why I live Downtown. I would like to see that considered.
- I wonder if there is a need for considering another dog park. Would it help with picking up after pets? I see people going in and out of buildings with dogs. Could there be a more convenient plot of land with facilities to take care of dogs?
- This resurgence of dogs came when the condos came. I like it for its safety factor – people walk dogs on streets late at night, I think it is wonderful.

9. In your opinion, are there any specific locations eligible for streetscape enhancements and/or redevelopment opportunities?

- If you head down Wilson, you could create a nice open canopy space. I'm talking about the garden by the water utility and the John Nolen, Willy Street intersection. I get complaints from customers about homeless people staying there. You could almost put seating for lunch there. You could really open that area up. I get a lot of female patrons. If they're on foot, they get nervous. It's very dark.

- What about all of the dead end streets that die at the end and usually have overgrown shrubs that pop up?
- On the Mendota side of town, a lot of those streets are little city parks. You could you possibly do that on this side.
- On North Shore Drive, they are redoing the park that backs up to ULI's newest apartment building. They are making it look nice. It looks really nice. The parkland developed will flow into the public park, but there will be shrubbery letting people know it is a private park.
- How would you integrate the pedestrian bridges?
- That would depend on the engineering standpoint, how wide it is. A challenge is getting the elevations correct. It needs to be 23.5 feet above train track, needs to consider ADA requirements, and needs to be a specific distance from lake.
- Can you go underground with the pedestrian connection instead of above ground?
- We looked at that option, but would run into the water tables. Pretty quickly, you're into pumping. The costs of going underground are tens of millions of dollars.

10. How would you recommend improving the urban design of Wilson Street so it is accessible for all user types?

- If you look in the Downtown Plan, building heights west of Martin Luther King, for the most part, have the Capitol view preservation limit. Further down W. Wilson, you go to ten, further down you go to six, and on Hamilton you go to four stories.
- I would like to see everything but the Capitol view done away with and each development judged on its own merits. Another thing – unless you know floor to ceiling heights, you don't know what they're talking about. Building heights should be in feet instead of stories. I have no idea what it means when Lance McGrath says, "I want to do a building ten stories."
- I like that Madison is not just a bunch of canyon-like roads with towers. You would lose that if you let people built tall buildings. Infill doesn't prevent sprawl. I think we're losing a lot of character of Madison in terms of historic buildings, which is the entire reason Madison is unique and why people want to live here. On University Avenue, they built all of those apartment complexes and it's kind of crazy. What if you put that everywhere downtown – the Bassett neighborhood, James

Madison neighborhood? Is that what everyone wants to see? I think smaller retail, smaller commercial, and houses are a good mix.

- I just have a question – is there a demand to build tall in Downtown Madison? There is a vacant lot right next to Paisan's. Is it possible to do what Henry is suggesting and keep it low?
- I think it's all about economics. But the development has to fit. You can't just ignore what is surrounding you.
- That vacant lot is owned by my landlord. They kept it because they wanted a good buffer between the buildings. They've owned it for 25 years or so. To put residential down there, the building would not be very wide in terms of windows and views for tenants.
- Considering the way King Street has evolved over the past 10 years, it would nice to see that expand Downtown to Wilson Street from the east to the west. There are a couple of small office buildings on King, Wilson, and Butler. There is just a spattering of buildings down there.

11. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

- The pathway from Monona Terrace to Lake needs to be considered. The bike path wall is so high. I wish there was more interaction between the lake and Monona Terrace. Lower the wall. Is there an option to open portions of it?
- That is one of the areas of conflicts. One of the biggest issues is with fishermen.
- There is also not a lot of good access. You can take bike elevator, but I wish there was better access to the Lake at Monona Terrace.
- The idea is that if there were something simple and narrow, it could be an extension of the structure in terms of a bike/pedestrian bridge. This is one of the struggles of Judge Doyle Square. We want to make sure there is a bike center there.
- Are you going to limit the pedestrian bridge to only pedestrian?
- It depends on how you design it. You can separate uses pretty well.
- I've been knocked down several times by bicyclists.
- I agree with that, but you would need to start with a structure where you address safety and walkability. If you can fix those things, it would enhance the livability of the city.

- What is going on with the John Nolen, Wilson, Willy Street intersection? That is a mess.
- That is one of the toughest intersections in the district. The next public meeting will incorporate a workshop for that issue.
- Can you put in a massive traffic circle?
- We would need to accommodate traffic. There are a lot of other vehicles there.
- Could you bring Lake Monona into that area to square it in? You need to add a pedestrian bike path. It is a very confusing area.
- You would need a roundabout for such a large area.
- There are railroad tracks in the intersection that make a roundabout difficult. You would need to shut down the entire roundabout for trains, which defeats its purpose.
- There is too much traffic for a roundabout.
- Is there any thought to doing a marina? Pulling a beautiful marina off of Monona terrace, machinery row?
- That was discussed in the Downtown plan and would happen in a future park plan.

Participants are encouraged to visit the project website. There are several of the opportunities to engage with the planning process and comment on specific initiatives.